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ABSTRACT

A follow-up study was conducted at William Rainey Harper College (WRHC) to evaluate and obtain externally required information about the dietetic technician program. Surveys were mailed to the 13 students who graduated from the program between spring 1990 and fall 1992 requesting information on their employment status, job title, length of service, relatedness of current job to program training, salary, job search experiences, evaluation of preparation, and continuing education experiences. In addition, surveys were mailed to nine employers, identified by the eight graduates who responded, to ascertain their perceptions of the graduates' preparedness. Study findings, based on the eight students' and seven employers' responses, included the following: (1) 37.5% of the graduates were employed full-time and another 37.5% were employed part-time; (2) all the graduates were employed in a field directly related to the dietetic technician program; (3) two graduates reported great difficulty in finding a job, while three had jobs lined up before graduation; (4) the average salary of the program graduates working full-time was $26,000 per year, while the average part-time wage rate was $15.65 per hour; (5) all the graduates were satisfied with their jobs, and 80% felt their jobs matched their skills; and (6) two employers rated the graduates as more effective than graduates from other colleges, while three rated them as equal to others. The survey instrument is included. (BCY)

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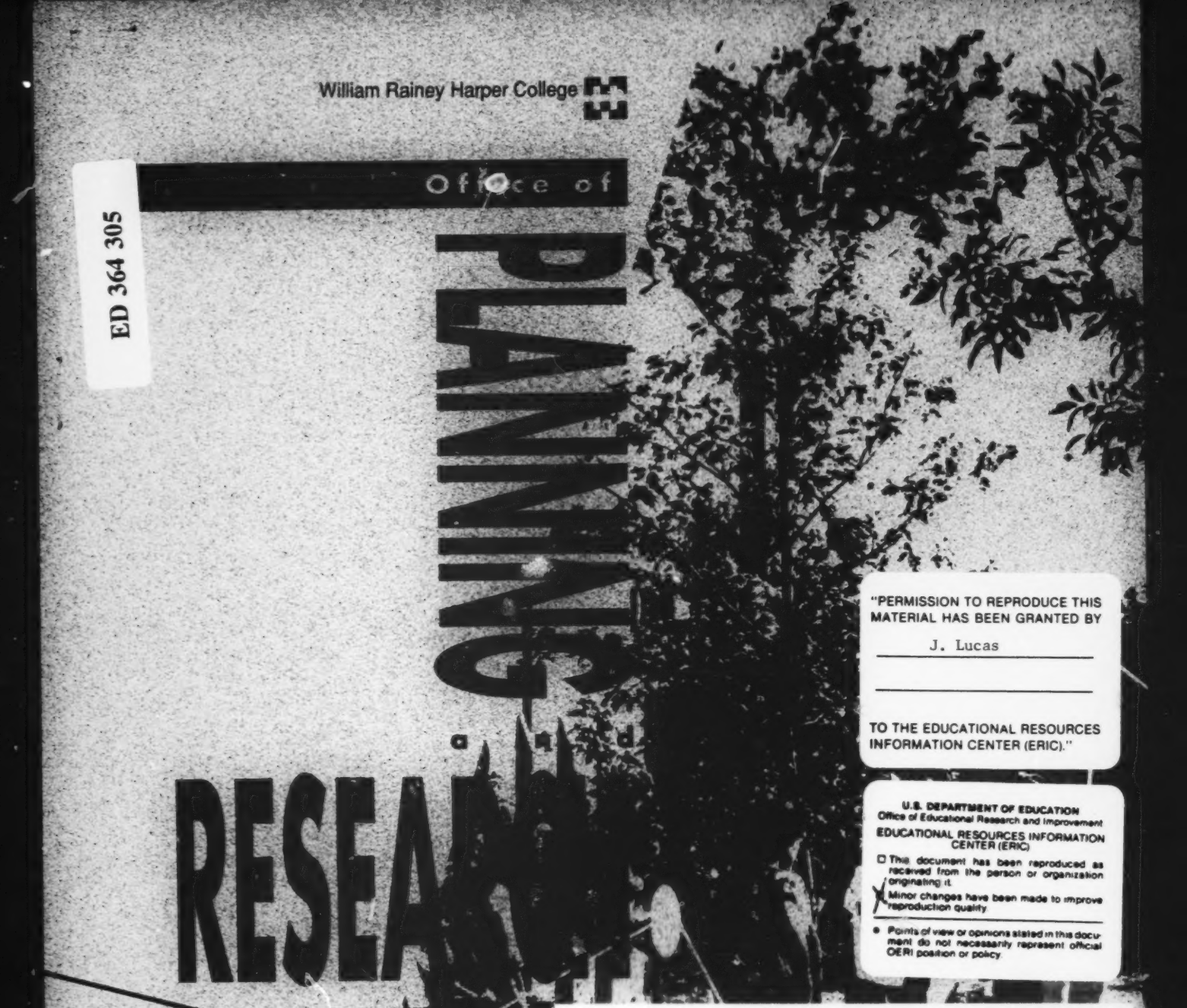

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Volume XXII, No. 10
December 1993

Follow-Up Study of Dietetic Technician Graduates (from 1990 Through 1992) and Their Employers

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Office of Planning and Research

Jane Allendorph, Coordinator
Dietetic Program

JC 940 042

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ABSTRACT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY WAS TO SURVEY FORMER DIETETIC TECHNICIAN GRADUATES AND THEIR EMPLOYERS AS A PARTIAL EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM. ALL THIRTEEN STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED FROM THE DIETETIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM, SPRING 1990 THROUGH THE FALL OF 1991 WERE SURVEYED.

AFTER TWO MAILINGS, EIGHT RETURNED THEIR COMPLETED FORMS FOR A 62 PERCENT RESPONSE RATE. THESE EIGHT RESPONDENTS LISTED NINE EMPLOYERS FOR WHICH THEY WORKED. A SURVEY WAS SENT TO THE NINE EMPLOYERS AND AFTER TWO MAILINGS, SEVEN RESPONDED FOR A 78 PERCENT RETURN RATE.

THE RESULTS OF THE TWO SURVEYS SHOWED THAT ALL DIETETIC TECHNICIAN GRADUATES WHO ARE HEALTHY ARE EMPLOYED IN A JOB AT LEAST SOMEWHAT RELATED TO THEIR EDUCATION. THEY ARE EMPLOYED IN A MIXTURE OF FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, AND SELF-EMPLOYED SITUATIONS AND FOUND THEIR JOBS WITH VARYING DEGREES OF DIFFICULTY. THEY EARN GOOD SALARIES AND ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS. EMPLOYERS RATE HARPER GRADUATES AS EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEES AND DESCRIBED COMPUTER SKILLS AND A VARIETY OF OTHER SKILLS THAT WILL BE NEEDED FOR FUTURE SUCCESS.

THREE-FOURTHS ARE REGISTERED DIETETIC TECHNICIANS WHILE SOME ARE ACTIVE IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS. OVER HALF HAVE CONTINUED THEIR EDUCATION IN SOME MANNER SINCE LEAVING HARPER COLLEGE.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to survey former Dietetic Technician graduates and their employers as a partial evaluation of the program. The study was requested by the Coordinator of the Dietetic Technician Program, Jane Allendorph.

POPULATION SURVEYED AND METHODOLOGY

All 13 students who graduated from the Dietetic Technician Program from Spring 1990 through the Fall of 1992 were identified. The survey forms shown in the Appendix were developed cooperatively by the Coordinator of the Dietetic Technician Program and the Office of Planning and Research. The graduate survey form was mailed to target population and after three weeks, a second mailing was made to the non-respondents. After another three weeks, eight or 62 percent had responded.

The eight respondents identified nine different employers for whom they had worked. The employer survey was mailed to the nine identified and after three weeks a second survey was mailed to the non-respondents. After this second mailing, seven employers returned completed surveys for a 78 percent response rate. The last Dietetic Technician graduate follow-up survey was conducted in 1991; however, prior to that, surveys were conducted in 1988, 1986, and 1991.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

More than half of the respondents have continued their education since leaving Harper. In the past, less than half continued their education. Among those who continued their education over half were taking courses at four-year colleges while the rest were taking professional workshops.

Seven were employed while the eighth respondent was not employed due to health problems. Two were self-employed, two had more than one employment situation and all were employed in a field somewhat related to their dietetic technician education. The average annual full-time salary was $26,000 while the average part-time wage rate was $15.65 per hour. This is about average for all Harper career graduates.

Graduates found their jobs by different means and with different amounts of difficulty. Three of the seven had their job lined up before graduation, one found a job easily, two experienced great difficulty in finding their jobs while the seventh decided to start a consulting business. Only one graduate felt not adequately prepared and that was in the area of community nutrition and food service in the schools. All were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.

Three were active in one of the dietetic professional associations and six were registered dietetic technicians. Only one graduate reported not being adequately prepared for the registration examination. The most frequently mentioned area where former students were least prepared was in the area of food service. In examining data from the employer survey, most rated the Harper graduates from the Dietetic Technician Program as very effective and all rated them as at least effective.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS (continued)

When asked to compare Harper graduates with graduates of other colleges, two employers rated Harper graduates as more effective, three rated them as equal and two employers had no basis to make a comparison. When asked to describe competencies they wished Harper graduates to have or competencies which will be most important for the future, the most frequently cited items was computer skills. Other skills mentioned were marketing themselves to other staff, reading charts, nutritional screening, menu writing futuristic view of health care, knowledge of patient satisfaction and continuous quality improvement survey process and ability to work with a nutrition care team.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

All Dietetic Technician graduates who are healthy are employed in a job at least somewhat related to their education. They are employed in a mixture of full-time, part-time, and self-employed situations and found their jobs with varying degrees of difficulty. They earn good salaries and are satisfied with their jobs. Employers rate Harper graduates as effective employees and described computer skills and a variety of other skills that will be needed for future success.

Three fourths are registered dietetic technicians while some are active in their professional associations. Over half have continued their education in some manner since leaving Harper College.

Follow-up of Dietetic Technician Graduates

Continuing Education After Leaving Harper	N	PCT
- Did not continue their education	3	37.5
- Continued education through hospital and/or professional association	2	25.0
- Continued education at four-year college	3	37.5
Total	8	100.0

Name of Facility	Course Description
NW Community Hospital	Nutrition and Elderly; Lab values and elderly various topics as diet and nutrition, sport nutrition.
Alzheimers Association	Training on eating styles of alzheimer
IAHA	Various nutritional and food service topics including OBRA, CIGS
Nat'l Lewis University	Human Services
IDA	Annual Meeting
NSDA	District meetings - all subjects - other continuing education seminars in nutrition and business management.
Oakton Community College	For Bachelors Degree
Elmhurst College	For Bachelors Degree
Northeastern	Spanish
Continuing Education	Word Perfect

Present Employment Status	N	PCT
- Employed full time	3	37.5
- Employed part time	3	37.5
- Self-employed - nutritional educational consultant	1	12.5
- Not employed due to health problems	1	12.5
Total	8	100.0

Employees Job Title and Length of Employment

Lutheran Home	Bethany Terrace	LSSI Add Center, Elgin
Arlington Heights	Morton Grove	Opportunity House, Aurora
Dietetic Tech/Clinical	Dir. Food Service	Practice in Client's Home
1-1/2 years	7 years	Counselor/Nutritionist
		2 years
Northbrook Park District	North Suburban YMCA	Self-Employed
Nutrition Instructor	Nutritionist	Nutrition Educator
Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Kraft Gen'l Foods	Fresh Fields	
Glenview	Palatine	
Sr. Technician	Food Demo Employee	
2 years	3 years	

Full-Time Salary	N	PCT
$15,000 - $18,000	1	33.3
$25,000 - $30,000	1	33.3
$30,000 - $40,000	1	33.3
Total	3	100.0

Median Salary - $27,500
Mean Salary - $26,333

Part-Time Wage Rates	N	PCT
$ 6.25 an hour	1	20.0
$12.00 an hour	1	20.0
$15.00 an hour	1	20.0
$20.00 an hour	1	20.0
$25.00 an hour	1	20.0
Total	5	100.0

Median Rate - $15.00/hr.
Mean Rate - $15.65/hr.

How Dietetic Graduates Found Their Present Jobs

- Newspaper Ad
- Article in "Vegetarian Times"
- Contact made in Clinical Lab Course
- Instructor
- Friend
- Promoting self in community

Difficulty in Finding Job	N	PCT
- Had job lined up before person graduated	3	50.0
- Found job fairly easily after graduation	1	16.7
- Found a job but only with much difficulty	2	33.3
Total	6	100.0

Why Was It Hard to Find a Job?

- Pursued self-employment because jobs were not easy to find - not many positions advertised in paper - letters to local long-term facilities did not turn up any prospects - coordinator did not have any leads.
- I wanted to work somewhere other than in a hospital which is the major employer for dietetic technicians.

Relatedness of Employment to Dietetic Technician Program

Degree of Relatedness	N	PCT
- Identical	1	16.7
- Closely related	2	33.3
- Somewhat related	3	50.0
- Not related	0	0
Total	6	100.0

Degree to Which Graduate was Prepared for Job	N	PCT
- The graduate feels job matches their education and allows graduate to practice the skills they were prepared for.	4	80.0
- Graduate was not adequately prepared for community nutrition and food service in the schools	1	20.0
Total	5	100.0

Satisfaction with Job	N	PCT
- Very satisfied	3	60.0
- Satisfied	2	40.0
- Bearable	0	0
- Dissatisfied	0	0
Total	5	100.0

Activities in Professional Associations	Active Member	Pay Dues Only	Not a Member
- American Dietetic Association	2	3	3
- State Dietetic Association	3	1	4
- Local Dietetic Association	3	0	5
- Dietary Managers Association/DMA	0	0	8
- DMA Certified	0	0	8

Are They a Registered Dietetic Technician	N	PCT
- Yes	6	75.0
- No	2	25.0
Total	8	100.0

-One reason given for not being a registered dietetic technician was that they had failed the last exam and were taking it again.

Did They Feel Adequately Prepared for Registration Exam?	N	PCT
- Yes	6	35.7
- No	1	14.3
Total	7	100.0

In What Subject Areas Did They Feel Unprepared?

- All subjects were covered fine. I did not have time at this time last year to study for the exam. I was working then full time at a nursing home 14-16 hours per day. Bad idea before an exam!
- Food service area needs to be strengthened through classroom education and experience on site.
- Fine details of food service.
- Food service
- Cannot remember - it was 2-1/2 years ago.
- Applying food therapy to clients who described their food related complaints.

Survey of Employers of Dietetic Technicians

Effectiveness Rating	N	PCT
Very effective	5	71.4
Effective	2	28.6
Acceptable	0	0
Borderline	0	0
Not Acceptable	0	0
Total	7	100.0

Comparison to Other Graduates Hired From Other Colleges	N	PCT
Harper graduates are more effective	2	28.6
They are equally effective	3	42.8
Graduates of other colleges are more effective	0	0
No basis for comparison	2	28.6
Total	7	100.0

Comments

What Competencies That Were Not Possessed by Harper College Dietetic Technician Graduates Would you Have Liked Them to Have Had?

- More marketing for their abilities - need to promote themselves and better educate other healthcare professionals of their potential.
- Suggest more experience in reading patient charts be incorporated into program. However, the graduates are able to catch on and increase speed with experience.
- Additional background on nutrition screening, use of computers for obtaining patient information.
- More experienced with menu writing, spreadsheets, specific diets.
- Basic information systems knowledge - DOS and Macintosh math skills.

What New Competencies Will Future Distetic Technician Graduates Need to Possess to be Effective?

- A futuristic approach to the changes in healthcare today!
- Increased knowledge about patient satisfaction, quality and continuous quality improvement - CQI.
- The ability to work with a nutrition care team (RD, Diet Asst.) additional computer skills.
- Familiar with computerized menus and patient screening for lab values, etc., to determine if malnourished.
- Survey process - inspections.
- Less emphasis on lab values and more emphasis on nutritional aspects of care.
- Basic computer knowledge.

APPENDIX

- Cover Letter

- Survey Instruments

William Rainey Harper College
1200 West Algonquin Road
Palatine, Illinois 60067-7398
708-397-3000

Fall 1993

Dear Director:

To maintain approval status with the American Dietetic Association, it is necessary for Harper College to have follow-up studies done on dietetic technician graduates and their known employers.

Harper College, in turn, can utilize the survey results to help in improving the curriculum and course offerings of the Dietetic Technician Program.

Please complete and return the enclosed questionnaire as soon as possible in the self-addressed envelope provided for your convenience.

Thank you for your help in responding to this request for information. Your feedback is very important to Harper College!

Very truly yours,

Jane Allendorph

Jane Allendorph, R.D.
Coordinator, Dietetic
Technician Program

jc
Enclosures

SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS OF HARPER COLLEGE

DIETETIC TECHNICIAN GRADUATES

* *

1- How would you rate the effectiveness of Harper College Dietetic Technician graduates you have employed? Check (x) one.

_____ A. Very effective
_____ B. Effective
_____ C. Acceptable
_____ D. Borderline
_____ E. Not acceptable

2- How would they compare to graduates you have hired from other colleges? Check (x) one.

_____ A. Harper College graduates are more effective.
_____ B. They are equally effective
_____ C. Graduates of other colleges are more effective than Harper graduates.
_____ D. Have no basis for comparison.

3- What competencies that were not possessed by Harper College Dietetic Technician graduates would you have liked them to have had?_____

_____

_____

_____

4- What new competencies will future Dietetic Technician graduates need to possess to be effective?_____

_____

_____

_____

William Rainey Harper College
1200 West Algonquin Road
Palatine, Illinois 60067-7398
708-397-3000

Fall 1993

Dear Alumnus:

To maintain approval status with the American Dietetic Association, it is necessary to have follow-up studies done on dietetic technician graduates.

Harper College, in turn, can utilize the survey results to help in improving the curriculum and course offerings of the Dietetic Technician Program.

Please complete and return the enclosed questionnaire as soon as possible in the self-addressed envelope provided for your convenience.

Thank you for your help in responding to this request for information. Your feedback is very important to Harper College!

Very truly yours,

Jane Allendorph

Jane Allendorph, R.D.
Coordinator, Dietetic
Technician Program

jc
Enclosures

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF DIETETIC TECHNICIAN GRADUATES

1- Have you taken any college courses, continuing education or in-service training since leaving Harper College?

College or Institution	Describe major field, type of continuing education or in-service training
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2- Present employment status - Check (x) one.

_____ A. Employed full time (30 hours/week)
_____ B. Employed part time
_____ C. Not employed but seeking employment
_____ D. Not employed
If not employed, why?_____
_____

IF YOU ARE NOT EMPLOYED, PROCEED TO QUESTION NO. 14

3- Name and address of employer: _____
_____
_____
_____

4- Job Title: _____

5- How many months have you been employed with this employer at this job?_____

6- If you are employed full time, what is your annual salary? Check (x) one.

___ A. $ 7,000 - $ 7,999	___ E. $11,000 - $11,999	___ I. $21,000 - $25,000
___ B. $ 8,000 - $ 8,999	___ F. $12,000 - $15,000	___ J. $25,000 - $30,000
___ C. $ 9,000 - $ 9,999	___ G. $15,000 - $18,000	___ K. $30,000 - $40,000
___ D. $10,000 - $10,999	___ H. $18,000 - $21,000	___ L. Over $40,000

If you work part time, what is your hourly rate? _____per hour

7- How did you find your present job? Check (x) one.

_____ A. through the coordinator
_____ B. Newspaper ad
_____ C. A contact made in the clinical lab courses helped me get the job.
_____ D. Through the Harper Placement Service
_____ E. Other (specify)_____
_____

8- How difficult was it for you to find a job? Check (x) one.

_____ A. I had my job lined up before I graduated.
_____ B. I found my job fairly easily after graduation.
_____ C. I found a job, but only with much difficulty.

IF YOU CHECKED "C", PLEASE ANSWER THE NEXT QUESTION.

9- Why was it hard to find a job?_____
_____

10- How related is your employment to a dietetic technician's duties? Check (x) one.

_____ A. It is identical.
_____ B. It is closely related.
_____ C. It is not related.

IF YOUR WORK IS NOT RELATED TO A DIETETIC TECHNICIAN, YOU MAY STOP HERE AND PROCEED TO QUESTION NO. 14.

11- Do you feel your job matches what you were prepared to do? Check (x) one.

_____ A. Yes, I feel my job allows me to practice the skills I was prepared for.
_____ B. No, I feel underemployed. I feel I am well prepared to perform the following duties which I cannot do on my present job? (Specify) _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____ C. No, I feel I was not adequately prepared in the following areas. (Specify)_____
_____
_____

12- How satisfied are you on your job? Check (x) one.

_____ A. I am very satisfied.
_____ B. I am satisfied.
_____ C. It is bearable.
_____ D. I am dissatisfied and am looking for other employement. Why dissatisfied?_____
_____

13- What are your activities in professional associations? Check the appropriate activity for each.

Association	Active Member	Pay Dues Only	Not a Member
American Dietetic Association	_____	_____	_____
State Dietetic Association	_____	_____	_____
Local Dietetic Association	_____	_____	_____
DMA - Dietary Managers Association	_____	_____	_____
DMA - Certified	_____	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____	_____

14- Are you a registered dietetic technician?

_____ A. Yes - go on to question No. 15
_____ B. No - answer below and stop

If not, why not?

_____ C. Too expensive
_____ D. Not needed for my current job
_____ E. Not employed as a dietetic technician
_____ F. Other (specify)_____
_____
_____

15- Did you feel you were adequately prepared for the Registration Examination?

_____ A. Yes
_____ B. No.

16- In what subject areas did you feel unprepared? (Specify)_____
_____
_____

William Rainey Harper College
1200 West Algonquin Road
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